

Renaissance Man

The Untold Story Of George DeBeeson



By
Max DeBeeson

Preface

A “renaissance man” is a modern day person who has acquired much knowledge or proficiency in a wide range of fields. There are many examples of this type of person in history and modern times. One of the prime examples referred to often is Leonardo da Vinci. He had great abilities in different disciplines. He was a painter, sculptor, humanist, scientist, architect, philosopher, and engineer.

George was a “jack of all trades” and very good at many of those. As Roland Reiss states in an interview quoted later, “he was kind of a Renaissance man misplaced.” George manifested gifting in painting, sculpting, drawing, mechanics, flying, inventiveness, imagination and pontificating on politics and human nature. I grew up a child of a third marriage and heard the stories about the past family and experiential history of my father, George. I called him George, not dad or father except in referring to him in the third person. Someone asked him why he let me call him George and he answered, “everyone else does, why shouldn’t my son?”

Over time, my father worked as a sign painter; airplane pilot and tech; animator for Disney and Walt Lantz; set artwork for Universal Studios; sculptor and ceramist; self employed artist doing hundreds of paintings over the years; manufacturing custom ceramic tiles and murals; models for fiberglass statues and panels. He was a good mechanic and could make almost anything work. We even built a cello that I play to this day. We played music together as a family.

One of the motivators to tell this untold story has always been George’s invention of an automatic pilot that outperformed others of the day. He never got the recognition he deserved nor did he profit from the invention or technology incorporated into it.

I often thought over the years, what a span of time his life embraced. From the horse and buggy days to space travel. Amazing what can happen in a person’s lifetime!

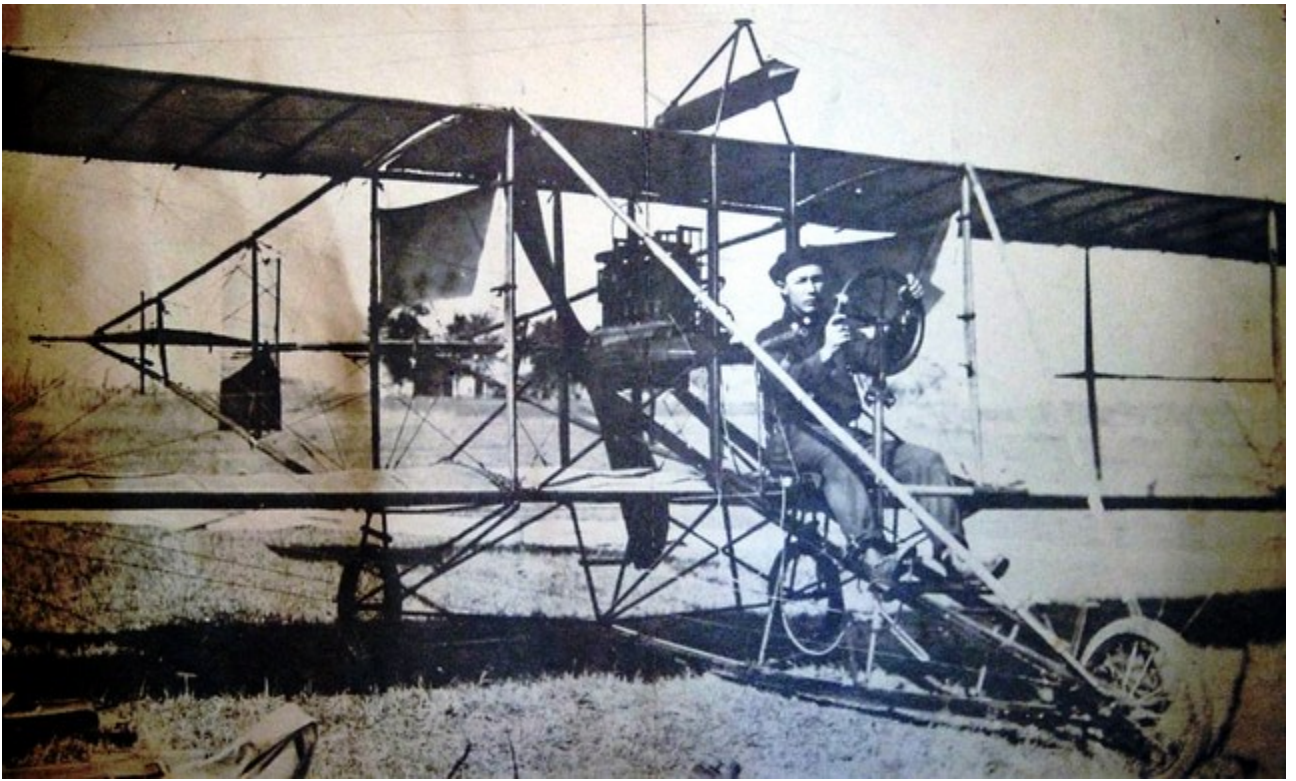
From the farm to fame...almost! Renaissance Man...The Untold Story

It's In The Genes

George DeBeeson, my father, was born George DeJean Beeson, in Shickley, Nebraska on May 31, 1897. My mother, was a DeJean whose family roots were from France. George F. Beeson was the father, who was a blacksmith by trade. The Beeson family also had French roots. Creativeness can come through the genes, and both sides of the family had talents of many sorts. That plus hard work and training make the difference in realizing your potential. George did chalkboard art in the classroom for his teachers. The portrait of a mother and child shown further on was done when he was 10 or 11 years old. Apparently, it was a copy, but very well done. It has been preserved and is in my possession.

In addition to art, George manifested mechanical ability and by the time he was a teenager, he helped build an airplane on their family farm with his older brother, Wesley. There is a picture included of George flying that plane.

I remember stories my father told of his growing up years in Shickley and Geneva, Nebraska. The kids would pull pranks, as has always been, on private and public property. One time, they moved the outhouse of a neighboring farmer. Another time, they tipped one over with someone in it! Another story was of dismantling a wagon and reassembling it on top of the courthouse! Another story was about Georges brother, Wesley, having to go to court for assault. The victim was badly beaten up and bandaged. The judge asked Wes what he hit the man with and he answered, "this" as he held up his fist. The judge said, "case dismissed!". The brothers had contests holding a broom with one hand with horseshoes hanging on it. They were all strong! They all, including George did some boxing and were not bothered by many.



Pool Balls And Broken Mirrors

Like many families, Georges' family began to migrate to the west coast. Some of them spent time on the way in Helena and Roundup Montana. At that time, it was still much like the western movies we've seen.

The miners would come in from their work and go to the saloons to drink. George described the saloons as having ornate mirrors and fixtures. There were pool tables and after some time of drinking, things would get rowdy. He described fights starting and sometimes the pool balls would fly, breaking mirrors and probably some heads! With pool balls being thrown and stuff breaking, he said he would watch it all happen from under a pool table!

George made it all the way to Bremerton, Washington. His Brothers had enlisted in the Navy previously and did a tour of duty as part of the "Great White Fleet". George enlisted in the Navy in 1918, but the war ended just as he finished his training in San Diego. He had a legal name change, joining the De to Beeson. George DeBeeson met Lillian Puckett and they married and started a sign business in Bremerton. They also started a family and had two children, George L. and Beryl June DeBeeson. In addition to the sign shop, George did other artwork to make a living. There is a large painting in the Methodist church in Bremerton of Christ in Gethsemane done by George. I visited there some years ago and it was still there



The DeBeeson Automatic Pilot “Iron Skull”

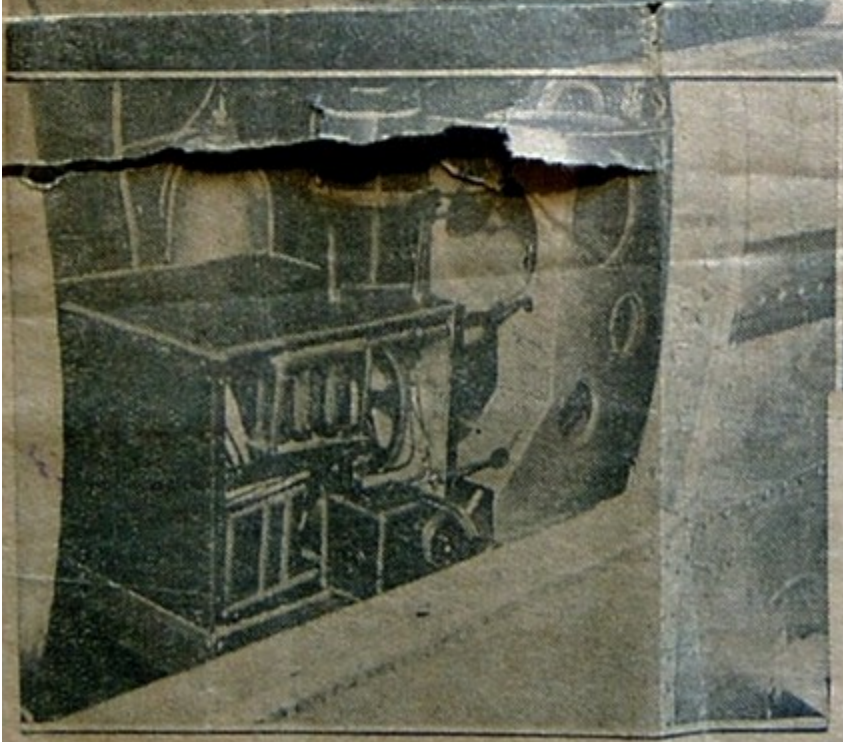
In 1914, the brothers built an airplane on the farm made from "piano wire and canvas and bicycle tires" and entered it in the Geneva County fair and won a prize. That was the start of George's keen interest in aviation that resulted in years of flying and culminated in developing a unique automatic pilot.

George kept up his pursuit of flying. He flew for twenty years and flew the Curtiss JN-4 “Jenny” much of that time. Eventually, George wound up in California and worked at various jobs from commercial advertising, welding, aviation instrument manufacturing, starting a flying school, and pursuing the development of an innovative automatic pilot.

Aviation and technology were changing rapidly through the decades of the 20's and 30's. I remember stories of George rubbing shoulders with some of the "greats" of those times like Frank Hawkes, Jimmy Doolittle, Francisco de Pinedo, Wiley Post, and the like.

He finally succeeded in his effort with the auto-pilot in 1929 and by 1931 had patented a robot that would outperform anything of the day, according to various reports (see clippings, and what others say). Several outfits offered to finance and manufacture the robot, but complications started cropping up that seemed to stop George from reaping the benefit of his invention. George worked for Lockheed around the time they came out with the Vega airplane that Wiley Post flew around the world with a new Sperry experimental auto-pilot. I had always heard stories that he lost the patent rights through divorce and then through a company he worked for. As I read through some of the documentation, I discovered that he was in litigation with a company that entered into an agreement with him, but he claimed tried to swindle him out of his interests. That was the Kormann Aero-Safety Appliance, Inc., a Nevada corporation operating in Glendale, California. George had divorced his first wife and apparently married a lady named Thelma who may have been involved in him losing the patent. It's not clear what happened, but he certainly did not become the wealthy individual he hoped to be. Things were happening fast in the flying world, and of course the automatic pilot became an important part of the future and history of aircraft. Whether George's invention was incorporated into the popular mechanism of the day or not is uncertain. Some family members claimed that Sperry or Continental Motors got the rights to it. General Electric wanted to test it further. The impact of his invention may never be known. One thing is sure, the expression of calling the auto-pilot "George", may have more meaning than meets the eye!

Set for Mechanical Flying Test



—Acme Photos.

FRANK HAWKS, speed pilot, is scheduled to hop this morning on non-stop flight to New York in this robot plane. Upper photo shows Hawks making last-minute inspection yesterday. Lower photo depicts robot equipment which will do all actual piloting of ship during the flight. (Story on page 3)

What Other's Have Said...

Newspaper and Magazine Excerpts:

Los Angeles Examiner, February 12, 1931: "Automatic Air Safety Device Passes Tests. Robot Holds Airplane on Even Keel. George DeBeeson, Inventor, Puts "Iron Skull" through Paces for General Electric Experts."

Los Angeles Examiner: "Iron Skull" Demonstrated at Air School. Initial Tests Indicate Automatic Control Handles Ship Better Than Pilots Can," Lawrence Talbot, President of the California Aerial Transport School, was the only "air official" with nerve enough to try the "skull" device during its initial tests, DeBeeson declared. Investigators of the General Electric Company, following initial tests also admit that the "iron skull" handles a ship even better than a human pilot-instantly correcting any deviation in direction or altitude."

San Antonio Light, Feb. 21, 1931: Press feature story and photos: "Replaces human control. Making another step in aviation safety is the "Iron Skull" flying device, demonstrated by George DeBeeson the inventor, shown in the plane, who says it will prevent tailspins, side-slips, maintain compass course and is "foolproof." Lower photo shows propeller which operates safety device, with DeBeeson explaining the way it works with Larry Talbot."

Popular Mechanics Magazine, May, 1931: Photos and write-up: "Iron Skull" which pilots plane in flight; it operates by magnetic compass or push-button control. "Iron Skull" gives airplane added safety" etc.

(George developed a simulator for training pilots too: Popular Mechanics-June, 1931)

Modern Mechanics, July 1931: Photos and write-up: "Robot Replaces Flight Instructor, Jean Allen a student pilot, is shown at the controls of the Robot instructor." etc. "A flight instructor which simulates real flying conditions and gives the student pilot the visual as well as mechanical "feel" of the airplane in flight." has been recently developed by George DeBeeson, a Los Angeles inventor.

Aviation Magazine, December 1, 1929: "Fog and Blind Flying. Solving the Problem of Fog Flying" published in pamphlet form by the Daniel Guggenheim Fund for the Promotion of Aeronautics, Inc., New York City, Oct, 1929. "...Other problems, such as the prevention of ice formation, automatic warnings of the danger of collision, and the use of so-called automatic pilot, have been studied under the auspices of the Fund with aid of Lt. Doolittle and the flying laboratory. IT IS PARTICULARLY INTERESTING TO NOTE, INCIDENTALLY, THAT DEMONSTRATIONS SINCE THE PAMPHLET WAS PUBLISHED POINT TO THE PRACTICABILITY OF AUTOMATIC PILOTS..." etc. etc.

D.C. Van Horn, Aviation Specialist, The General Electric Company: "It's great! I never saw anything like it."

Franklin rose, Manager, Varney Air Lines: "The instrument flew the plane better that we could," Rose said after the plane landed. "It was a wonderful demonstration. It took the ship out of tail spins automatically, put the ship through perfect turns, controlled the air speed, altitudes and glides without aid. I felt like a passenger instead of the pilot."

Frank Hawks, (Original Caption) Hawks To Fly 'Robot' Plane. Lt. Commander Frank Hawks, famous speed pilot, is scheduled to hop off at 4:30 tomorrow morning from the Municipal Airport on a new kind of aerial adventure--a nonstop flight to New York in a robot plane. The plane, Sky Chief, a fourteen-cylinder, low wing monoplane, propelled by a 750.H.P. motor and capable of a 260-mile-an-hour speed at high altitudes, will be used by Hawks. The actual piloting of the air speedster will be left entirely in the sensitive mechanical hands of an automat, a robot perfected by George De Beeson, 36. The device was tested by Hawks, recently, and he declared that it worked perfectly.

New Concept Explained...

What it has demonstrated after thirty hours in various flights:

1. Immediately restores an airplane from a spin, side slip, or even from an inverted position to normal flight at once.
2. Flies an airplane unaided, regardless of weather or visibility.
3. Follows any prescribed compass course unaided to within less than two degrees variation.
4. This device in a simplified form will steer a boat unaided on any compass course prescribed much closer than it is possible for a person to do.
5. It will replace the expensive and complicated "iron mike" in sea-going craft at 1% of the present cost.
6. The DeBeeson Automatic Control can be manufactured at a cost of around \$100 allowing \$50 for distribution, and will sell at from \$500 to \$1000.

Article by Howard Maish further explains:

The Mechanical Pilot

Howard F. Maish, T-68

Member, Professional Pilots Association

"It is a known fact that the art of flying has only one hazard-blind flight. During the years Man, watching the flight of birds and insects, has been striving to perfect a means of transportation that would equal theirs. Practically all the advancement in flying machines, aerodynamics and the industry in general, is in the art of flying. The proof of this is the fact that today an experienced pilot will take an old so-called obsolete ship and do things in acrobatics that a few years ago were impossible, for the reason that the ships were thought unfit.

Today, practically every conceivable maneuver of the bird has been perfected, except blind flight, and birds do not attempt that. But the mail must go through-time, over other means of travel, must be made. In order that this may be accomplished and, above all, the life of the pilots maintained in safety when they are surrounded by fog, a multitude of various instruments has been invented and perfected for the purpose of enabling the pilot to continue through the fog and he has before him a array of instruments that give him the position of his ship in relation to the horizon. It has been found, however, that about eighty percent of the pilots of today cannot fly blind by these instruments. Instruments do not eliminate the human element; many pilots become mentally fatigued and panicky and the result, as shown by statistics, is that at least ninety percent of the fatal accidents are due to human failure; not to ship failure. In other words, ninety per cent-pilot error; ten per cent-ship error.

It is therefore, plain to see that perfection of motors and planes is only a small part, there still exists human frailty-the fear of fog. The main stumbling block to aerial travel today is fog and all the principal instrument companies have been experimenting in mechanical flight. The Guggenheim Fund, after months of research and experiment, and the expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars, finally reported to the world that, in their opinion, mechanical flight was the most feasible means of combating fog; in short, elimination of the human element. This has been done. An automatic control, known as the DeBeeson Robot has been perfected. More than thirty hours of actual flying with the Robot in full control of the ship has demonstrated the fact that this device will fly a ship within one-half of one degree perfect at all times, make perfect turns, prevent and recover from side slips, tail spins and stalls, and even recover a ship from an upside down position.

In working on this Robot, the first basic principle to attract the attention of George DeBeeson, the inventor, was that of the pendulum. Although he experimented with and perfected this, it could not be made reliable to any degree. This was due to the action of centrifugal force overcoming the effect of gravity in turns or acrobatics. While the device would fly an airplane for short periods under ideal conditions, the pendulum would oscillate in spite of damping, causing a violent rolling movement which, if not corrected, would increase rapidly to a very dangerous degree, losing

altitude at a rate of as much as 800 feet per minute. This principle is still being worked on and recently \$50,000 was appropriated for experimentation along this line in San Francisco.

The next principle worked on by Mr. DeBeeson was an electrical device, almost and exact duplicate of that which is claiming attention at the present time in other circles-almost three years after Mr. DeBeeson discarded it. It is reported that the same difficulties are being met with as Mr. DeBeeson encountered-violent over control, especially in lateral movement, due to weight, fire hazard and the complicated wiring of shunt coils and magnets, as well as the necessarily delicate construction, all of which made it highly impracticable for Mr. DeBeeson to continue along these lines. The soundness of his decision is verified by the enormous amount of capital which has been expended by others with almost no encouraging results.

Mr. DeBeeson next used a gyroscope with an elaborate system of pulsating energy which received its direction by longitudinal and lateral gyroscopes-the gyros taking up new positions in relation to the ground when turned. After six years experimenting, the attempt is still being made to overcome this fault, but with no appreciable degree of success. By the way, the only robot pilot ever sold was turned over to the Navy at a cost of \$15,000. While this device received a lot of publicity, it was highly impracticable, and would not fly an aeroplane for more than two or three minutes because the changing position of the gyroscopes rapidly caused a list, which, if not corrected, would be disastrous to the ship.

Needless to say, even after a stage of perfection was reached in all the before mentioned experiments, the controls were never operated with the smoothness and precision necessary for successful flight. Flying itself is highly professional, and perfection is acquired only after long and painstaking practice. It is the opinion of many experts that the greatest improvement in aeronautics is that of the art of flying itself. Safe to say, the average student on his first solo flight is more a master of his craft than even Lincoln Beechy at the time he met his death. To copy or improve on the human hand has been striven for and worked toward with an outpouring of wealth and labor the world over but with absolutely no degree of success, and leading engineers of all the major companies recognize the fact that an entirely new principle must be discovered. Over a long period, Mr. DeBeeson used all the known principles, but finally discarded them, arriving at the same conclusion.

The Opposed Lobe Balance System

About three years ago Mr. DeBeeson worked out the idea of the Opposed Lobe Balance, an idea unique in itself, and the fact that twenty-two basic claims are fully allowed by the government, fully covered by patents and patents pending, stamps it as entirely original. A sense of balance equal to that of the human mind is reproduced mechanically, giving a smoothness of control, regardless of visibility, which has been so long sought after in flight.

After the discovery of the opposed Lobe Balance System-which we will call the brain- it was necessary to create a muscle to operate the controls. To operate the muscle, a nerve system must be built up to connect the brain and muscle This covered almost two years of flying experimentation and consumed practically all of Mr. DeBeeson's private fortune-but SUCCESS was his.

Directing a positive clutch arrangement by using a low pressure vacuum system an even or variable flow of power was secured whereby the mere weight of a cigarette paper at the brain of the device will, through its muscle, develop a constant or variable pressure of from one to seventy-five pounds instantly on the controls as rapidly as necessary. In fact the device will operate any or all the controls as many as six hundred times per minute, coming back to neutral after each operation. The ruggedness of this device was demonstrated when the case was sealed and allowed to bounce about on the floor and rear seat of an automobile from Los Angeles to New York City and return to Los Angeles. The device was then placed in an airplane and flown. Suffice it to say-the operation was perfect and no adjustments were necessary.

The brain or balance system, known as the Opposed Lobe Balance System, is mounted in such a way as to allow gravity to be the damper which gives the balance system all the good qualities of the pendulum and none of its faults. Gravity as the damper, prevents fluctuating and swinging from

side to side. Damping liquid or other methods cause a lag which, in turn, allows the ship to over control. Compare the gyroscope system, which has been so long experimented with, revolving at a speed of forty thousand revolutions per minute, with the balance system which has no revolving parts; again, centrifugal force which makes the gyro oscillate, causing the ship to vary from normal flight, is one of the natural forces that acts favorably on the DeBeeson device, causing the ship to bank at the proper angle to prevent side slips. This balance system will also work accurately upside down, which is so necessary in order to bring a ship out of spins, also upside down positions.

This balance system in turn operates a low pressure system called the nerve system consisting of a very simple vacuum pump and equalizer which have no wearing parts. This pump and equalizer keep a constant vacuum on the nerve system, the impulses from the balance system actuating the mechanical part of the device that actually moves the controls. This mechanical system has many operations, varying in accordance with the impulses from the nerve system vacuum relay. In connection with the vacuum system there is a relay and set of little valves which regulate the return of the controls to neutral. This is one of the most important features of the device. After the ship has varied from normal flight, and the controls have moved and corrected the tip or variation, as the ship comes back to normal it is absolutely necessary that the controls are brought to neutral position at just the right time to prevent the ship from over controlling or going past center. This device brings the controls back to neutral with just as definite and accurate motion as does a pilot.

The mechanical part of the device which moves the control consists of a leverage system by which any amount of pressure necessary can be derived without interfering with the sensitive vacuum system. The fastest moving part in the mechanical system is sixty revolutions per minute-thus long life and dependability are assured.

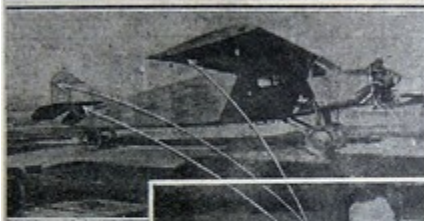
The directional stability of the ship is centralized and controlled by a specially designed compass "DeBeeson Patent" which is attracted by the earth's flux only, and is not affected by local attractions, such as metal tubing, magnetos or running motors, as it needs no compensating pins. The lag, as we know it in ordinary needle compass companies, is eliminated, giving a positive direction, thus enabling the robot to hold a course of less than one degree variation. This is four times more accurate than it is possible for an experienced pilot to accomplish.

This compass has no needle or parallel lines, but an indicator points to zero when the ship is on its course; The hand moving to either left or right, not only indicates that the ship is off its course, but in what direction it is off."

SAFETY DEVICE PASSES TESTS

Makes Plane Safer Than Cradle

CRAFT THAT automatic control guided through air for demonstration at California Transport Aerial School. GEORGE DE REESON, below, with his "iron skull" which maintains plane on even keel.—Examiner photo.



ALL THINKING DONE FOR PILOT

The plane is controlled by a pilot in the air, but the pilot is not required to do any thinking. The plane is controlled by a device which is called the "iron skull". The device is a mechanical contrivance which is attached to the plane and which is controlled by a pilot on the ground. The device is called the "iron skull" because it is made of iron and it is shaped like a skull. The device is controlled by a pilot on the ground who is called the "iron skull" pilot. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane.



Plane's Iron Brain
GEORGE DE REESON, inventor, and Miss Lathrop
demonstrating compound device that controls every movement of plane.—(Examiner photo.)

'IRON SKULL' DEMONSTRATED AT AIR SCHOOL

Initial Tests Indicate Automatic Control Handles Ship Better Than Pilot Can

Los Angeles, Calif., Feb. 12.—A biplane, controlled by a device called the "iron skull," was demonstrated today at the California Transport Aerial School. The device is a mechanical contrivance which is attached to the plane and which is controlled by a pilot on the ground. The device is called the "iron skull" because it is made of iron and it is shaped like a skull. The device is controlled by a pilot on the ground who is called the "iron skull" pilot. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane.

ROBOT HOLDS AIRPLANE ON EVEN KEEL

George De Reeson, inventor, Passes 'Iron Skull' Through Tests for G. E. Experts

What airplane experts believe may usher in a new era of automatic airplane safety control was officially demonstrated yesterday. The device, which maintains all automatic control of the plane, was demonstrated by George De Reeson, inventor, at the California Transport Aerial School. The device is a mechanical contrivance which is attached to the plane and which is controlled by a pilot on the ground. The device is called the "iron skull" because it is made of iron and it is shaped like a skull. The device is controlled by a pilot on the ground who is called the "iron skull" pilot. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane.

Just How He Feels

Had every pilot there had been through the same experience—being kept in a constant state of alertness by a device which is called the "iron skull"—they would have known the value of the device. The device is a mechanical contrivance which is attached to the plane and which is controlled by a pilot on the ground. The device is called the "iron skull" because it is made of iron and it is shaped like a skull. The device is controlled by a pilot on the ground who is called the "iron skull" pilot. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane.

Compound Control

The "iron skull" operates without any human intervention, and is controlled by the device which is called the "iron skull". The device is a mechanical contrivance which is attached to the plane and which is controlled by a pilot on the ground. The device is called the "iron skull" because it is made of iron and it is shaped like a skull. The device is controlled by a pilot on the ground who is called the "iron skull" pilot. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane.

De Reeson, Inventor

George De Reeson, inventor, designer and holder of the "iron skull" patent, made the automatic control device a success today. The device is a mechanical contrivance which is attached to the plane and which is controlled by a pilot on the ground. The device is called the "iron skull" because it is made of iron and it is shaped like a skull. The device is controlled by a pilot on the ground who is called the "iron skull" pilot. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane. The "iron skull" pilot is the one who is responsible for the safety of the plane.

FRANCESCO DE PINEDO

George built and installed a "robot" in Italian flying ace Francesco De Pinedo's plane for a flight from New York to Baghdad as per telegram from Frank Hawks. Unfortunately, DePinedo's plane crashed on take-off September 2, 1933, being overloaded with fuel.

A EULOGY OF FRANCESCO DE PINEDO THE FORGOTTEN HERO

by Enrico Pelitti

"A message by a California POINTer (Tony Ghezze) on May 11 brought to my attention the big celebration that both Chicago and St.Louis were planning for the 75th Anniversary of a remarkable event in aviation history: the landing in Chicago on May 15, 1927 of Italian aviator Francesco De Pinedo.

It stirred up memories of my years as a teenager in Italy in the late 20's, when De Pinedo's pioneering flights to the Orient and the Americas had become a legend, and even wearing a De Pinedo jacket (a sky-blue double-breasted wool blazer) was a fashion statement (I owned one).

Francesco De Pinedo was born in Naples on Feb. 16, 1890 to a patrician family. Attracted to the sea as he grew, he entered the Royal Naval Academy (the same one I attended), and graduated in 1911. As a naval officer he saw action at sea in the Italo-Turkish War and in the first World War. In 1917 he volunteered for air duty as a reconnaissance flyer, and when the Regia Aeronautica was created in 1924 he transferred to it. Trying to demonstrate the feasibility of travel by air, he was soon preparing for a tour of the Orient by seaplane, that would cover 34,000 miles, and eventually took him to Australia by May 31, 1925, and to Japan by Sep. 26.. By November he was back in Rome, to a triumphant welcome.

De Pinedo was not a product of Fascism, but his successes added prestige to the Regime, and Mussolini decided to use him as a "messaggero di Italianità". He suggested a tour of the Americas, and gave full support to its preparation. For it, De Pinedo chose a Savoia Marchetti S-55 flying boat, and for the crew picked Capt. Carlo Del Prete and Sgt. Vitale Zacchetti. He named the plane "Santa Maria", like Columbus' vessel.

He took off from Sardinia on Feb. 13, 1927. All of Italy was following every detail of the flight, including school kids like me. First stop was in Kenitra in Morocco. One of my mother's cousins was living near by, while preparing to open a Pharmacy in Rabat. He and his father (my mother's uncle) joined the rest of the Italian colony to greet the Italian flyers. I am the fortunate owner of a letter beautifully hand written by my mother's uncle, in which he refers to the event.

The crossing of the Southern Atlantic from Africa to Brazil, and the extensive tour of South America, with flights over vast unexplored areas of Brazil interior, were very adventurous, and required a lot of resourcefulness, courage and imagination. The Santa Maria finally reached New Orleans on March 19, 1927, the first foreign plane ever to enter the United States.

Unfortunately, while touring the Southern states, misfortune struck. During refueling in the Roosevelt Reservoir, 60 miles from Phoenix, the careless disposal of a lit cigarette by a laborer ignited the gasoline on the water and destroyed the plane. Initial suspicion of sabotage was quickly dispelled. Everybody agreed that it was an accident, nevertheless it would mean the end of the tour. Mussolini, conscious of the prestige the tour was bringing to Italy, could not let that happen.

He ordered the immediate construction of an exact replica of the Santa Maria. It was completed in Italy in record time, and arrived in New York by boat on May 1st. In a week it was fully assembled and ready to fly. But a full month had been lost on the original schedule, and in the meantime pressure was building up for a non-stop flight between America and France in the competition for the Orteig Prize. Casualties were also beginning to mount.. Two Americans (Davis and Wooster)

had been killed on take off, and two Frenchmen (Nungesser and Coli) were lost after attempting the flight from Paris.

The Santa Maria, with a top range of 1300 miles, could not compete for the Orteig Prize, but De Pinedo knew that he should be able to fly his Atlantic leg before other events eclipsed his past achievements. He brought his new plane back to New Orleans, rearranged his schedule and took off from there on May 14. After an unscheduled stop in Memphis because of weather, he headed for Chicago. A squadron of American military planes escorted him over the Illinois river to the Chicago waterfront. When they stepped ashore on May 15, 1927, the Italian airmen were literally mobbed by the thousands of Italians waiting for them. This is the event whose 75th Anniversary was being celebrated now in Chicago.

De Pinedo was still hoping to start the Atlantic flight not later than May 21. But Lady Luck was not with him. The flow of headlines followed him for a short while. He was in Montreal on May 17, but then was forced by weather to stop in Quebec and Shippegan N.B., arriving at Trepassy , Newfoundland only on May 20. That was the day Lindbergh took off from New York, and by the time he landed in Paris next day, his story was capturing all the headlines in all of the world newspapers, crowding out any other news. In the meantime the Santa Maria could not get in the air until the 22nd. It could not make Horta in the Azores because of strong head winds, and had to be towed by a fishing boat the last 200 miles. After repairs and stops in Portugal and Spain, it was back in Rome on June 16.

A period of obscurity followed for De Pinedo, interrupted only by the Air Force Cross, normally reserved for British fliers, bestowed on him by the British Government "for distinguished service to aviation", only weeks after the one bestowed on Lindbergh. Promoted to the rank of General, De Pinedo was given diplomatic and administrative assignments that would keep him out of headlines, where his popularity would make Balbo uncomfortable.

Anxious to recapture a place in aviation history, De Pinedo resigned from the Italian Air Force in 1933, and came to the United States to purchase a Bellanca monoplane as a private citizen, "dropping hints of his plans to set a new long distance record by flying non-stop from New York to Bagdad". It was in New York that I finally had a chance to meet him personally.. As a cadet of the Italian Navy, I had come to the United States with the Navy training ship "Amerigo Vespucci". After 10 days in New York, we were getting ready for the return trip to Europe.

On August 31, 1933, a farewell reception was given on the liner "Conte di Savoia" for the staff and crews of the Italian training ships. It was past 10 o'clock at night, and I decided to get away from the noisy ballroom, and take a stroll on the after deck looking at the New Jersey lights across the river in the clear night. I was alone on the large deck, except for a person leaning on the railing at the very end. As I got closer, I recognized Francisco De Pinedo. We exchanged a few words, and I learned, without details, that he also expected to leave New York the next day. While it was quite emotional for me to meet one of my heroes, it gave me a sense of sadness to discover that he was alone and nobody would pay attention to him. This time it was Balbo and his squadron of 24 seaplanes, who had left New York only a few weeks earlier, to catch all of the media attention.

Of course I did not know how close De Pinedo was to his tragic end. The Vespucci left New York on Friday September 1st, and only upon reaching Punta Delgada in the Azores on the 17th I learned that Francesco De Pinedo had died in the crash of his Bellanca plane on take off at Roosevelt Field* on September 2nd, just one day after I met him. It filled me with profound sadness."

Memorial services were held for him in New York at St. Patrick Cathedral, with American military planes circling overhead. And a full state with military honors was held in Italy after his coffin reached Rome."

The DeBeeson robot proved to be very successful in the tests by various companies and pilots. It was revolutionary. Times were moving rapidly in aviation development. George had worked for some big companies in the field of aeronautics and had this passion to perfect his robot system that would outperform the gyro systems then available.

Some sites quote the event of Frank Hawks flight to New York as having a Sperry autopilot aboard, but it was a DeBeeson one:

(Original Caption) Hawks To Fly 'Robot' Plane. Lt. Commander Frank Hawks, famous speed pilot, is scheduled to hop off at 4:30 tomorrow morning from the Municipal Airport on a new kind of aerial adventure--a nonstop flight to New York in a robot plane. The plane, Sky Chief, a fourteen-cylinder, low wing monoplane, propelled by a 750.H.P. motor and capable of a 260-mile-an-hour speed at high altitudes, will be used by Hawks. The actual piloting of the air speedster will be left entirely in the sensitive mechanical hands of an automat, a robot perfected by George De Besson, 36. The device was tested by Hawks, recently, and he declared that it worked perfectly.

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MOTION PICTURES USED IN TRAINING PILOTS

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11-3-20-31

Interview with Roland Reiss

As an aside, I'm including an excerpt of an interview of Roland Reiss done by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution in which my father is described as a "Renaissance man misplaced". Certainly Mr. Reiss is not correct to assert George DeBeeson invented the first automatic pilot, but his description of my father's background and influence on Mr. Reiss is very interesting. Here is the excerpt concerning George:

"The other person I want to mention who was very, very important to me. He was a man who lived in south Pomona named George DeBeeson. He was an incredible man! He worked for Disney and left over a labor dispute. He painted California landscape school oil paintings and he was kind of a Renaissance man misplaced. He had invented the first [sic] automatic pilot for the airplane. He showed me photographs of him with Marconi. He had flown "Jennys" [Curtis JN-4D] and all that sort of thing. He had a ceramics factory in south Pomona where he made black panthers and tigers. I have to show you this one of [a] little girl with [a] lamb which in those days were sold at Bullocks. They were never painted. They were glazed white. The tigers and panthers were glazed in color. I painted some of them for him. I would just come in and work on things now and then. Before meeting George, I signed up for an art class at the Recreation Department and a graduate student from Claremont was supposed to teach this class. He came down twice and then we were told he wasn't going to come any more, but we'll get an instructor for you. So the next week there was this old man named George DeBeeson standing there. He immediately adopted me as his art apprentice. It was an incredible experience because behind his large concrete block factory he lived in a tarpaper shack. He was probably sixty-five years old and his wife was twenty-four. She was a church organist and he built this giant organ for her to rehearse in the home. His son-in-law was Korla Pandit, who was the great figure on television in the early days, who played the organ and all the women would sigh over his playing. Korla would come out on weekends and they would have dinners and I would always be there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How do you spell his name again?

ROLAND REISS: K-o-r-l-a is the first name. P-a-n-d-i-t is his last name. He was a Hollywood East Indian. He would talk to me about walking on coals and East Indian philosophy. DeBeeson also had this life-size plaster fountain in which one of his son was peeing amidst a group of swans. Even though it was in their backyard, it became a major scandal in the little town of Pomona. He was an incredible character. I think what impressed me was his restless, inventive mind. He was firing ceramic tests for the government which would later become the kind of ceramics used in space technology, ceramics that would withstand very high temperatures. He taught me California landscape school painting. I would go out on weekends with him to do that. He made me study Michelangelo, Vermeer and Cézanne in large books published by Phaidon. He taught me everything he could teach me. He was just a wonderful, wonderful man. I recalled years later when I finally wound up at UCLA and thought I was really a hot shot. I brought back all my slick junior year work to show him. He was very wise, he said, "This is exactly what I'd be doing if I were your age." And then he said to me - I will never forget this - "You are better than all those people in Claremont." - Oral history interview with Roland Reiss, 1997 Aug.-1999 June, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



WALT DISNEY'S Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

January 20, 1938.

Mr. George De Beeson,
808 Robinson Street,
Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Mr. DeBeeson:

In regard to the drawing samples which you submitted for our consideration, our reaction to your work is that you possess talent but require training in order to meet the requirements of our productions. However, we feel your work is worthy of consideration.

We are arranging a try-out class to start Monday Morning, March 7th at Nine o'clock. If you care to avail yourself of the opportunity, we shall be glad to have you join this group.

Please bear in mind, however, that we cannot promise you a position with the Studio until we see what possibilities you show in the try-out training course. If you present yourself at the Studio, the first four weeks must be spent on your own time. Nothing that you do during this period will be used by the Studio in production. This preliminary time will be spent under our supervision in determining your drawing and creative possibilities and your ability to adapt yourself to various other requirements of this business. However, you must bear in mind that no salary will be paid during the first four weeks. As a contribution towards your expenses, during this preliminary period, the Studio will, however, pay the sum of Two Dollars (\$2.00) per day exclusive of Sundays.

In the event we should decide that you have possibilities for our line of endeavor, you will be employed at a starting salary of between Eighteen Dollars and Twenty-five Dollars per week, depending upon your estimated value to the Studio at that time. You will be required to sign a contract covering a three years term. During this term the Studio will retain the right to terminate your services at the end of any three



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Transition to the art world

After the fiasco of losing the rights to his invention through divorce and corporate litigation, George reinvented himself as an artist and pursued an art career. He lived in Burbank, California and went to work for Walt Disney and Disney Productions as an animator and background painter.

George worked on some of the most famous of the Golden Era Disney feature animated films. Snow White, Fantasia, Pinocchio, Bambi plus numerous shorts. He enjoyed the work there and often told stories of the pranks the animators pulled on each other. George had a new hat that someone kept trimming a little bit off of the brim until it was finally noticeable. Another time, somebody sewed the pockets of his suit coat together – he had the habit of shoving his hands in the pockets...not that time! One day they got the idea of putting Limburger cheese around on and under everything in the cubicle of one of the animators when he went out to lunch. After he came back, everyone waited to hear the results - “it stinks in here!” Over and over, he kept repeating that as he was examining everything. Everyone got a big ha ha out of that!

George’s daughter, Beryl worked there for sometime. She married a wonderful musician, Juan Rolando who eventually change his persona and name to become Korla Pandit – which is another story. During that time, they were having some labor disputes at the Studio and George moved on. After working for Walt Lantz and Universal Studios, he started up a ceramics manufacturing business in Bell, California.

George was able to design, make the originals, the molds, and produce several themed lines of ceramics that sold all over the United States and Canada. Eventually, he moved the business to Pomona, California. He bought property and built a building for producing the ceramics and lived at the rear of the property in a one room house. It was the house that “Jack built” as it evolved into more and more rooms over time. Before he left Disney’s, he met and married Opal Kampmeier, a music teacher, which started a new era for him of art and music.

George met Opal while working at Disney’s in 1941. She was teaching at a music school in Los Angeles. Opal mentioned to a staff person she worked with of her interest in knowing how they made animated films. He said “I have a friend that works there and could give you a tour”. She did, and George took a sudden interest in piano lessons. Opal interviewed him and he impressed her with “Kitten On The Keys”! He took a lesson or two and showed up with roses and asked her out on a date. When they returned to her home, there was the boy friend from work sitting on the porch! It was a whirlwind courtship and trip to Las Vegas for a wedding!

Opal continued on as a music teacher over the years out of their home and George went with his artwork and ceramics. They were married almost 25 years. He passed away February 23, 1965. They had one son, Max and continued to live at that property in Pomona till then.

The ceramics business mushroomed and George hired a crew of people to work for him. Orders were so plentiful that he could not carry the accounts receivable for the 90 days some took to pay and had to eventually shutdown. He started again with a jobber instead of a representative and built up the business again. This time, the price he got was doubled by the jobber and then doubled again by the stores. With what he received, he had to pay a crew and costs and was making no money. Again he closed the business. Creative and inventive as he was he began to do custom ceramics, sculptures, tile murals and oil paintings. What he did, he did well and fast. That seemed to satisfy him and meet the needs. Opal kept teaching from her home and had 40 or more students studying piano and organ. Their son, Max took up playing the cello and eventually this led to another phase in their life, music together.

From the time George was a kid, he made or repaired stuff. His dad and brothers were blacksmiths. He learned to build airplanes on the farm in Nebraska. George flew for 20 years and eventually designed and built the automatic pilot told about earlier in this book. It didn’t seem there was anything he couldn’t make. He told stories of the early player pianos with violins and other instruments that he would find and restore to playing condition. He would find something that

needed new bellows and make the bellows and so on. In the back of the ceramics plant in Pomona, there was a corner for a large workbench, anvil, and forge. He used clay, plaster of paris, wood, metal, whatever to make things. He made the frames for his paintings some of which were 30" x 40" and larger. He knew how to make ornamentation for them out of various materials. When making ceramic tiles, he could carve wood or plaster with patterns to impress on the fresh clay to make decorative tile. He produced porcelain statues of the Goddess Pomona for the city of Pomona. George even developed a process to put pictures on ceramic tile and fire the image permanently into the glaze. That led to doing large panels of tile murals done with airbrush and brush, one of which was 30' long and mounted on a memorial wall of a hospital in Springfield, Mo. Another large project was for the City Of Hope.

Other large sculptures were done to be reproduced in fiberglass figures and panels. George DeBeeson was a name recognized all over the country. From fame to fortune..almost! He was well educated and articulate in many different ways, but not with a degree. George was examined by a college professor and declared to have the equivalent of a college education. He had natural gifting as well as some training and lots of experience. He studied oil painting with Hansen Puthuff, renowned California artist. He studied with Joshua Meador and others. George could do a beautiful landscape painting in 4 hours or less. He sold dozens and dozens even hundreds of paintings over the years. California landscapes were his favorite, but a few portraits and still lifes.



Music and Instrument Making

For a person who couldn't seem to carry a tune, George did amazing things with music. He repaired the old player instruments and that included violins when attached. He took up playing violin as a young man and studied with Ward Baker, a well known violinist of the day. George built 4 violins over the years. When he was a schoolboy, George was called to the front of the music class by his blind teacher. She said, "George, you are not singing with the others. Why?" "I can't sing Miss Owens." She played some notes and had him sing them. "You are right, you can't sing". He was dismissed from singing class! However, later in life George did play some piano and violin. He and Opal and Max played trio music together when Max was able on the cello. Not only did they play music together, George and Max built a cello together when Max was age 15.

In those days, there was no internet to "Google it." There were no books available to them on cello making. George knew the procedure from having built the violins and knew what the formula for the dimensions should be. Using a school instrument as a model and some innovations, they proceeded. Starting with raw wood of spruce for the top and maple for the back and sides, the wood was cut lengthwise and diagonally. The wedges were glued together, thick edge to thick edge. The outside edges were roughly cut to shape. A plaster cast of the back of the school instrument was made and then a positive cast from that. A set of duplicating arms with a little router was used to roughly shape the contour of the the top and back from the plaster cast. A combination of power tools and handwork did the fine shaping. It is a precision job to get the contours and thicknesses correct for the final outcome. The sides or "ribs" are very thinly sliced slabs of maple that are steamed and curved and glued together in a jig and to the top and back. The neck is shaped separately and glued to the body. An ebony fingerboard, tailpiece and pegs were the only parts purchased premade.

It was a summer project for Max with his father's supervision and help. It turned out well and Max plays it to this day! Refinished sixty years later.

The three of them together and individually would play for private bookings and music became a greater part of their lives. The legacy of George's creativity has been passed down several generations now. He never made the fortune he hoped to make at various points in his life.

However, George DeBeeson stands tall among pioneers of flying, artists, and entrepreneurs of the 20th century. What a period of time to have lived...from the horse and buggy to space travel! "Let George do it"! He did it!



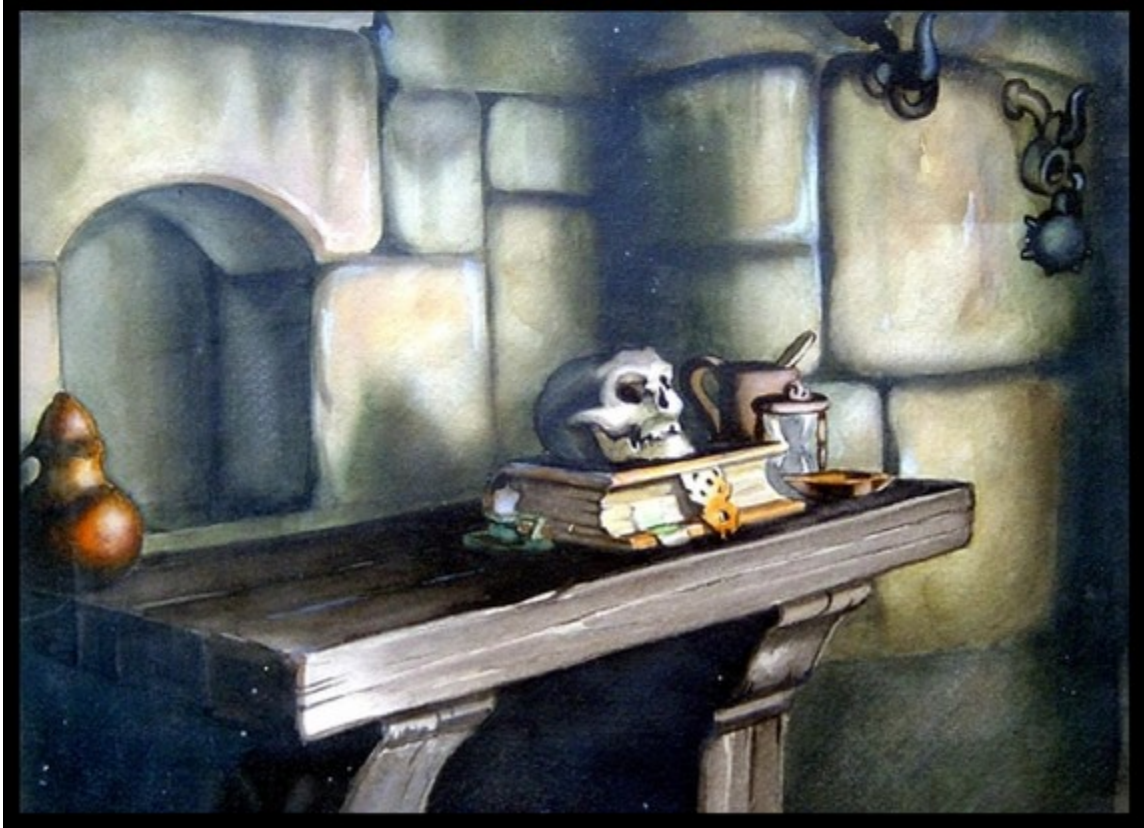
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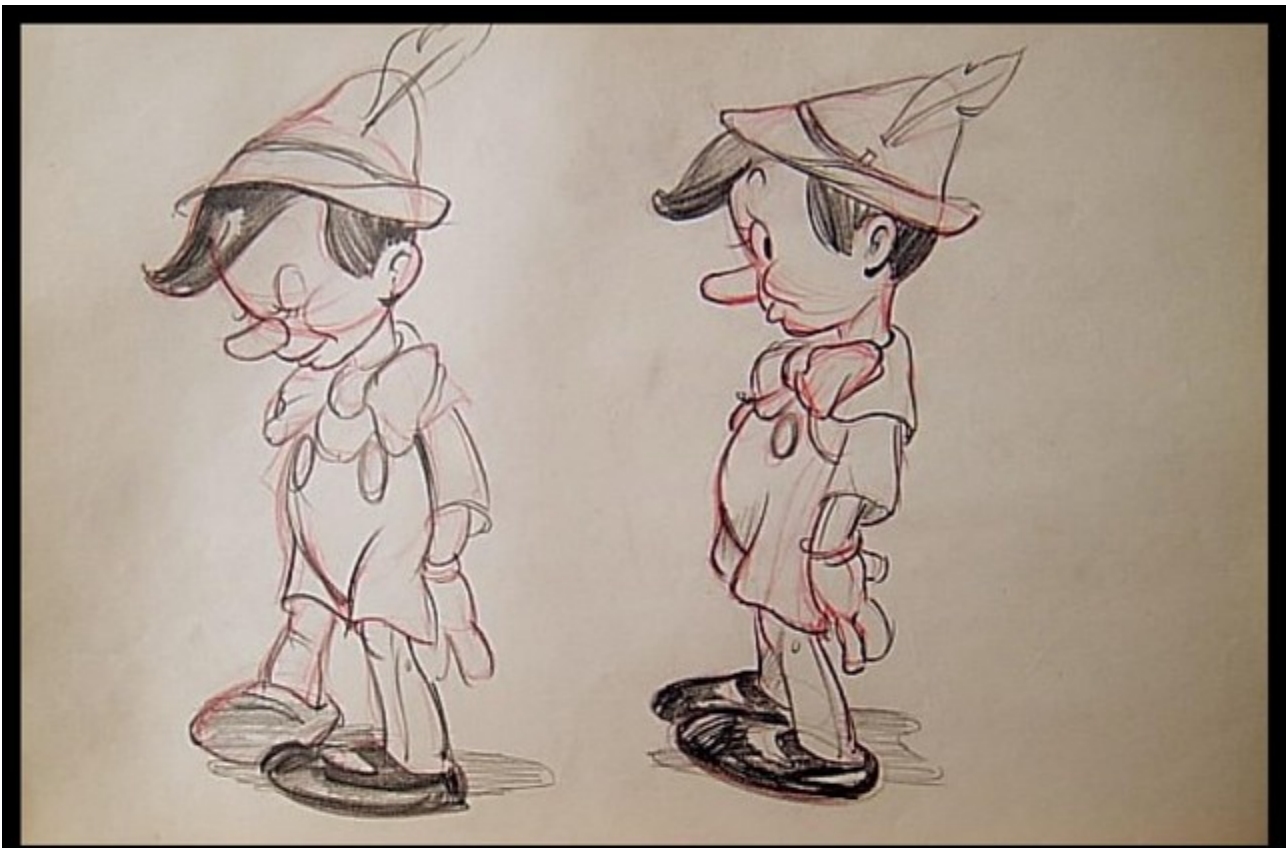
George passed away on Feb. 22, 1965. He lived an active life full of adventure and creativity. Eventually he married Opal Kampmeier and they spent the remaining years in Pomona, California. George spent the rest of his life doing art and ceramics and Opal, teaching piano and organ. Their son, Max eventually became a pastor and raised a family in Canada. He still plays the cello he and his father built when Max was 15 years old. George has left a wonderful legacy extending to four generations. He went from the “farm to fame – almost”. He had some fame, but wealth, not so much! Opal lived to be 98 ½ and got to see her great great granddaughter before she passed away! As we’ve said before, there may be more to the saying “let George do it” than meets the eye. He was a unique individual and along with Opal, they did it!



Picture Gallery

Animation







Paintings:







Ceramics:







Instruments & Sculpture:





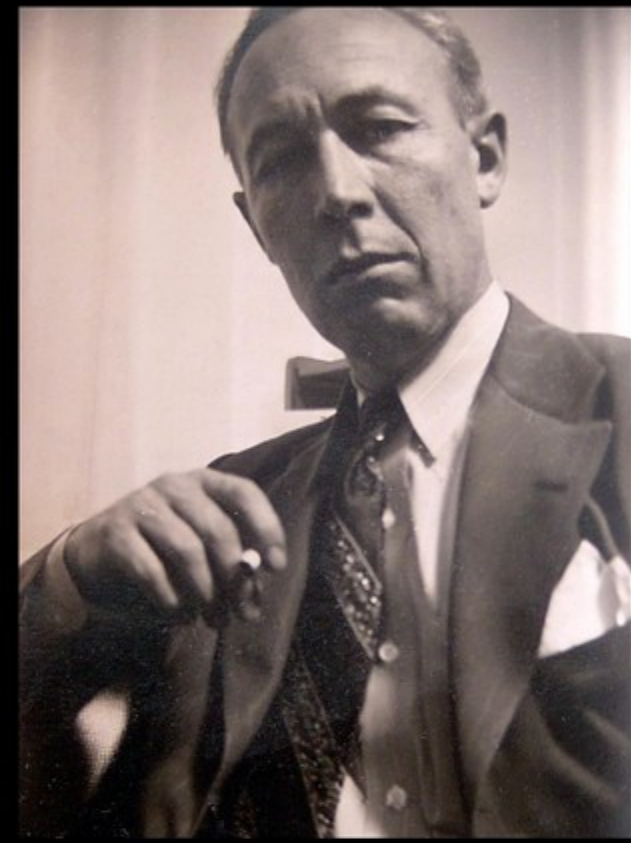




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Instrument Building







*George and Artist
Fried Hanson Putney*

